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In FCC Complaint, CIA Says ABC Distorted News

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The Central Intelligence Agency filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission yesterday, charging that ABC News "deliberately distorted" the news in reporting that the agency conspired to kill a U.S. citizen.

The CIA complaint charged that the network violated the "fairness doctrine" and asked the FCC to conduct an inquiry, make findings and determine what corrective action should be taken, if any.

In a statement late yesterday, the CIA said that it had been accused wrongfully in ABC newscasts last September of conspiring to assassinate Ronald Rewald, who is under indictment for defrauding investors in a Honolulu firm.

After the broadcasts, the agency issued a sharp denial that it had hired Rewald, who claimed his now-bankrupt company was a CIA front. ABC refused to retract its story at the time, saying that it was merely reporting allegations by Rewald and Scott Barnes, who was described by ABC as having an "extensive intelligence background."

Rewald was indicted by a federal grand jury this year, which charged him with defrauding investors of \$22 million and lying when he said the CIA helped direct his business. Rewald sued the CIA last spring in connection with the bankruptcy of his firm.

Rewald claimed his firm was used "exclusively for CIA covert operations." The CIA at the time denied it had any role in running the company, but conceded the agency had had "a slight involvement" with it.

The CIA said its complaint was filed with the FCC yesterday "after careful consideration and after several requests to have ABC correct its error. Today ABC informed CIA that it would air a short statement accepting CIA's denial of one of the charges of attempted assassination, but has refused to address any other aspect of its broadcast."

On its World News Tonight program last evening, ABC reported on the CIA complaint and disclosed that it had promised to broadcast a clarification of the September news reports alluding to Rewald.

The network had reported that a former prison guard—Scott Barnes—had charged in a sworn statement that the CIA had hired him and planned to kill Rewald while he was in prison. "The CIA said Barnes' charge was totally false and denied any relationship with him," newscaster Peter Jennings said.

"ABC News continued to investigate," Jennings continued. "We asked Barnes for further evidence to support his charge. He was unable to provide it. We made other efforts to corroborate his charge and they also failed. Finally, we asked Barnes to take a lie detector test, but he refused. ABC News has now concluded that Barnes' charge cannot be substantiated and we have no reason to doubt the CIA's denial."

"After notifying the CIA that we were going to make this clarification, the agency late this afternoon filed a complaint with the FCC which said our report was distorted and violated the fairness doctrine."